

The Influence of Environmental Factors on the Development of Ultra-Orthodox Preschool Boys in Israel

Anat Golos, Miri Sarid, Michal Weill, Aviva Yochman & Naomi Weintraub

Anat Golos, PhD, OT, Faculty of Medicine, School of Occupational Therapy of Hadassah and the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel.

Miri Sarid, PhD, Western Galilee College, Acco, Israel.

Michal Weill, MD, Developmental Center of Meuhedet Health Fund and Siach Sod Rehabilitation Center for Children with Special Needs, Jerusalem, Israel.

Aviva Yochman, PhD, OT, Faculty of Medicine, School of Occupational Therapy of Hadassah and the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel.

Naomi Weintraub, PhD, OT, Faculty of Medicine, School of Occupational Therapy of Hadassah and the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel.

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Introduction. Children's development is affected by various environmental factors including cultural and socio – economic status (SES). Israel is a multi - cultural country, home to a wide variety of ethnic communities, including that of the ultra-orthodox Jews who comprise about 10% of the population. **Objectives.** To compare the prevalence of children at risk and/or with developmental delay (at risk/delayed) among the ultra-orthodox (UO) community with that which is reported in the literature and to compare the performance of children in kindergarten versus that of children in preschool. **Methods.** Motor (using the M-ABC test), visual–motor integration (using the VMI test) and cognitive performance (using the MAP test) of 203 UO boys

from low SES were assessed. **Results.** A higher percentage of children who were at risk/delayed in gross motor and motor–cognitive skills were found compared to the percentage reported in the literature. However, as opposed to expected, the results did not show that there was a higher percent of at-risk/delayed children among the kindergarten group as compared to those in the preschool group. **Conclusions.** Our findings are consistent with the research literature suggesting that children’s cultural background and economic constraints can affect their motor and cognitive development. Thus, occupational therapists and other health professionals should be more culturally sensitive and more aware of the specific values and practices of families, which can affect the development of children. However, in this study, given the uniqueness of the UO community, it is difficult to distinguish between the influence of the cultural factors and the influence of socio-economic factors. Therefore, it is recommended to repeat this study among children from medium-high SES, as well as children from low SES and different cultural backgrounds.